

# EPI FOCUS

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## Special points of interest:

- *Getting ready for this year's flu season.*
- *A special look at meningitis.*
- *What Does CD/EPI Do?*
- *School Reporting materials updated to improve surveillance.*
- *The launch of a new web reporting system, MDSS.*

## LETTER FROM OUR MEDICAL DIRECTOR

Health Care Professionals,

I'm often amazed when I discuss with colleagues the function of the Health Department. Their perception of the Health Department usually involves only one or more of the following: shots, restaurant inspections, and/or the "VD clinic". However, the scope of public health represents a broad range of disciplines from investigation of communicable disease to health policy and environmental health issues. Although it is difficult to briefly describe all functions of the Health Department, a summary seems in order.

The Health Department is separated into four divisions; Community Clinical Services, Community Nursing, Environmental Health, and Administration which includes the Communicable Disease/Epidemiology Unit, STD/HIV/TB Clinics, Laboratory, and Health Promotion/Education. Community Clinical Services division operates at six sites throughout Kent County, and provides standard immunizations, travel vaccines, and WIC services. Community Nursing features the Nurse Family Partnership along with the Maternal and Infant Support Services programs to provide comprehensive services to new mothers and their infants. Other Community Nursing programs include vision and hearing testing in schools, lead testing and correction, and support services for refugees

and children with special health care needs. In addition to restaurant inspections, the Environmental Health division also monitors waste disposal and animal control. The STD Clinic, in conjunction with our regional lab, provides HIV testing and counseling in addition to standard testing and treatment. The TB Clinic provides comprehensive outpatient management of active and latent TB cases. In recent years, public health has expanded further to include the daunting issue of bioterrorism which has been added to the Administration division.

However, despite the broad scope of activity at the Health Department, one of the most significant, and often times unrecognized areas of importance remains the Communicable Disease/Epidemiology (CD/EPI) Unit. CD/EPI staff is dedicated to preventing the spread of communicable disease through surveillance, disease investigation, and education. In recent years, this work has become increasingly vital due to newly emerging infectious diseases such as West Nile Virus, SARS, and pandemic flu.

The Information Age, where huge quantities of information are readily available via the internet, has also changed the way we conduct disease surveillance. As an example, the new web application of the



Mark Hall, MD, MPH

Michigan Disease Surveillance System has improved information sharing between counties, the State of Michigan, and soon health care providers. However, the Information Age has also heightened the need for robust epidemiologic and data analysis principles to assure appropriate conclusions are gained from the glut of information. Strong investigation and surveillance skills are invaluable in the management of communicable disease, and continue to have increased importance across the multiple initiatives of the Kent County Health Department.

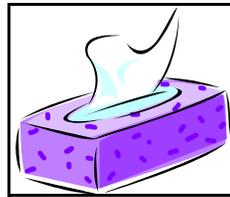
I am proud to be associated with the talented CD/EPI team you will meet in this and upcoming editions of the Kent County Health Department's EPI FOCUS newsletter. Please don't hesitate to provide feedback as we strive to make the newsletter as valuable and user-friendly as possible.

Mark Hall, MD, MPH  
Medical Director  
Kent County Health Department

## GEARING UP FOR THE FLU SEASON

*Quick Fact: The Health Department publishes a Communicable Disease Report on a monthly basis, and it is available on our web site at [http://www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthDepartment/CD\\_Epid/Reports.htm](http://www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthDepartment/CD_Epid/Reports.htm).*

As many of you know, last year's flu season was out of the ordinary. Not only did we experience flu cases earlier than typically expected, but we also experienced a vaccine shortage. Though, what you may not know is that Kent County participated in the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) enhanced influenza surveillance program. Typically, the Health Department relies on schools and sentinel



surveillance sites for reporting of flu-like illness. However, last year, through further assistance from local physicians and hospitals, the Health Department was able to report additional data regarding the total number of patient visits for flu-like illness and confirmed influenza cases to the CDC on a weekly basis. The Health Department hopes to continue enhanced surveillance for the 2004-2005 flu season. This year will also include a new written plan addressing community education and weekly analysis of influenza data for posting on our website. Please feel free to contact the CD/EPI Unit at (616) 336-3028 for more information on this plan.

As a reminder, the Health Department does NOT provide influenza vaccinations. Instead, the Visiting Nurses' Association periodically utilizes the Health Department and other community locations as a vaccination site throughout the season. For more information on these sites, we would like to refer you or your patients to the Visiting Nurses' Association's website at <http://www.vnawm.org/pages/1/index.htm>. Information is also available through their 24 hour "shot hotline" at (616) 235-5439.

## THE MENINGITIS VACCINE IS AVAILABLE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS AT THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Now that school is back in session we can expect a rise in a number of illnesses including meningitis. Bacterial meningitis (in particular that caused by *Neisseria meningitidis*) is especially a concern for college students.

The Meningococcal quadravalent A, C, Y, W-135 polysaccharide vaccine is available to reduce the risk of spread for this illness. For college students living in dorms, this vaccine is available at the Health Department Immunization Clinic (Fuller site only) for \$75.00.



*Quick Fact: The Health Department's CD/EPI Unit would be happy to give a presentation on physician reporting to any size group. Please feel free to contact us at (616) 336-3028 for more information.*

## DID YOU KNOW...? PHYSICIANS ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT UP TO 77 DIFFERENT DISEASES.

Under 333.5111 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, all physicians, separate from laboratories, are required to report up to 77 different diseases to their local Health Department.

Many of these diseases are commonly underreported. A few include:

- Hepatitis B in pregnant women

- Hepatitis A (acute)
- Hepatitis C (acute)
- Hepatitis B
- Pertussis
- Viral Encephalitis
- Toxic Shock Syndrome
- The unusual occurrence, outbreak, or epidemic of any disease, condition, or nosocomial infection.

A complete list of reportable conditions and further information on physician reporting requirements can be found on our web site at:

[http://www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthDepartment/CD\\_Epid/Disease\\_Reporting.htm](http://www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthDepartment/CD_Epid/Disease_Reporting.htm).

## WHAT DOES THE CD/EPI STAFF DO ANYWAY?

Protecting the public's health from communicable disease threats requires a proactive disease surveillance system, timely epidemiological assessment, and ongoing disease prevention education. The Communicable Disease and Epidemiology Unit at the Health Department consists of 10 dedicated individuals who share these responsibilities in an effort to prevent and control disease in Kent County.

When you report a disease via phone, fax, or soon the internet, one of two clerical staff begin processing the case by entering basic case information into a pair of databases (including the Michigan Disease Surveillance

System if not already reported through it). Three public health nurses are then assigned the task of case follow-up in which they gather risk factor information to help identify the source of infection, provide education to reduce the risk of transmission, and trace close contacts to assure they receive proper treatment to reduce their risk. Three epidemiologists and two planner/evaluators are charged with aggregating data into reports, which provide clues to necessary interventions as well as the effectiveness of these interven-



Kent County Health Department CD/EPI Staff

tions in reducing disease in Kent County.

By reporting diseases in a complete and timely manner, you help to promote the health of Kent County residents.

## VIRAL MENINGITIS IS OFTEN UNDERREPORTED

Because viral or aseptic meningitis is typically diagnosed through clinical symptoms, it is frequently underreported. Many physicians do not realize that Public Health only receives meningitis reporting through physicians and hospital infection control. Laboratories are not required under law to report the

enteroviruses such as coxsackievirus and echovirus which causes approximately 90% of viral meningitis cases. However, meningitis is a reportable condition for physicians. If you diagnose a case of viral or aseptic meningitis, please remember to report it directly to the Health Department or if you diagnosed

the case at the hospital, report it to Infection Control. Together we can make a difference.

## KENT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT REVAMPS SCHOOL REPORTING

Similar to physicians and laboratories, under 333.5111 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, primary and secondary schools are also required to report the possible occurrence of any communicable disease to their local Health Department. For this up-coming school year, the Kent County Health Department has improved the school reporting process by redesign-

ing the current data collection form and developing a supplemental information booklet to accompany the new forms. It is hoped that these new materials and additional staff follow-up to schools who have not reported on a weekly basis will improve communicable disease reporting and prevention.



This will also make the up-coming school year particularly fascinating as we monitor communicable disease in our county; we may witness an increase in case counts due to improved reporting. This should be considered when utilizing Kent County data.

### *Quick Facts: Food-borne Illness*

*One of the most common causes of food-borne illness is Noro-virus which typically has an incubation of 24 to 48 hours.*

*Mistakenly, people often believe the cause of their food-borne illness is the last thing that they ate.*

*The Health Department investigates all food-borne illnesses. Please encourage any patient you suspect of having a food-borne illness to report their condition to the CD/EPI Unit, so a complete 72 hour food history may be taken.  
(616) 336-3028*

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## MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH LAUNCHES A NEW WEB BASED REPORTING SYSTEM

Communicable disease surveillance is a cornerstone of public health decision-making and practice. In the past, surveillance systems were developed with too few thoughts about coordination and data sharing. The Michigan Department of Community Health has recently launched a new web-based reporting system which uses data and information technology standards to ensure efficiency, integration, and interoperability of communicable disease surveillance data at the federal, state and local levels.

The Michigan Disease Surveillance System (MDSS) is a web-based communicable disease surveillance system that allows for the electronic capture and management of communicable disease cases. The

MDSS can receive disease reports through manual online entry of case referrals, or importation of laboratory reports. The MDSS supports case assignment and tracking, manages the collection of demographic, clinical and epidemiologic data, and generates tabular summary and detail reports. The MDSS will revolutionize public health in Michigan by gathering and analyzing information quickly and accurately, ultimately enhancing the overall public health response.

The Kent County Health Department has been utilizing the MDSS to report communicable diseases from the local level to the state since mid-June. Preparations to expand the user list to include local area health-care providers are underway.



Please call the CD/Epi Unit at the Health Department at (616) 336-3028 if you are interested in scheduling MDSS trainings.